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ABSTRACT

Recent research among adolescents has found a positive association between private self-consciousness and peer self-disclosure, and a negative association between such disclosure and loneliness. High school students (N=207) who had participated in an earlier study (Franzoi and Davis, in press) were contacted 1 year later, and the same variables were again assessed. Subjects completed a questionnaire on biographical, social, and psychological information. Standard regression analyses were performed on data from measures of private self-consciousness, peer self-disclosure, and loneliness. The results indicated that greater private self-consciousness was significantly associated with greater self-disclosure to peers; and that self-disclosure to peers was significantly associated with fewer reported feelings of loneliness. These data replicated findings from the previous study and revealed no evidence that disclosure produces greater private self-consciousness nor any evidence that loneliness reduces disclosure. These findings support the view that self-consciousness produces disclosure, which in turn reduces loneliness. (Author/NRB)

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Private Self-Consciousness, Self-Disclosure, and Loneliness Among Adolescents: A Longitudinal Analysis

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Subject Index: 33

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Abstract

Franzoi and Davis (in press) recently found among adolescents a positive association between private self-consciousness and peer self-disclosure, and a negative association between such disclosure and loneliness. Participants in that study were contacted one year later, and the same variables again assessed. Two major findings emerged. First, the pattern of results is essentially the same one year later (i.e., replication). Second, two alternative explanations for the original results are not supported by these longitudinal data. There is no evidence that disclosure (Year 1) produces greater private self-consciousness (Year 2), nor any evidence that loneliness (Year 1) reduces disclosure (Year 2). These findings support the original view that self-consciousness produces disclosure, which in turn reduces loneliness.

Private Self-Consciousness, Self-Disclosure, and Loneliness Among Adolescents: A Longitudinal Analysis

In the last decade a considerable amount of research, conducted by a number of different investigators, has focused on the subjective state of loneliness, such as feelings of anxiety, depression, self-derogation, and helplessness (e.g., Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson, 1978: Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980; Horowitz and French, 1979). Another approach has been to examine possible antecedents of loneliness, especially the quantity and quality of social interaction (e.g. Brennan, 1982; Chelune, Sultan, and Williams, 1980; Jones, 1981; Franzoi and Davis, in press).

Recently, Franzoi and Davis (in press) employed structural equation techniques to test a model in which two personality characteristics (private self-consciousness and social perspective-taking) were posited to affect a social behavior (self-disclosure), which was in turn expected to influence feelings of loneliness and isolation. Utilizing a sample of 442 high school students, those investigators found that, overall, the model appeared to do a good job of describing the relationships among these variables. Specifically, it was found that greater private self-consciousness was significantly associated with greater self-disclosure to peers; further, this greater self-disclosure was significantly associated with fewer reported feelings of loneliness. Thus, these results offered substantial support of the assumptions underlying that theoretical model: namely, that personality characteristics can have a sizable and predictable impact on social behavior and the quality of social life.

The biggest shortcoming of the Franzoi and Davis (in press) investigation lies in the fact that it was strictly a cross-sectional, and not longitudinal,

study; thus some questions about causality could not be adequately addressed. In particular, the results of that study left two interesting possibilities open. First, the Franzoi and Davis results indicated that greater private self-consciousness leads to greater disclosure of self-information. However, it is also possible that this influence is reciprocal--that is, that the act of self- disclosing to others could produce a greater awareness of private thoughts and feelings. Thus, the causal direction posited in the Franzoi and Davis study may not be the only explanation possible for this finding.

Second, the Franzoi and Davis study indicated that greater disclosure leads to less loneliness. Again, however, it may be argued that the directionality of this influence could be reversed. That is, greater feelings of loneliness may cause lower levels of self-disclosure, either because lonely people have fewer social contacts (e.g. Brennan, 1982; Russell, et. al., 1980) and thus less opportunity to disclose, or because greater loneliness may in some fashion simply reduce the desire or willingness to self-disclose.

Another possible association involving loneliness has to do with level of private self-consciousness; increased loneliness may affect tendencies to attend to one's own private thoughts and feelings. That is, adolescents who are socially isolated may retreat into their own private worlds. If this is true, increased loneliness should result in an increase in level of private self-consciousness.

Of course, the most appropriate way in which to answer such questions of causality is through the use of a longitudinal study, in which the relationships among these variables over time can be examined. Accordingly, in the present investigation we returned one year later to the high school at which the original Franzoi and Davis study was conducted. All of the variables

measured in the initial study (personality characteristics; self-disclosure; loneliness) were again assessed, providing us with the wherewithal to explore the questions of causality outlined earlier. In addition, it allowed us an opportunity simply to test for a second time the basic relationships found in the initial study, i.e. to replicate our earlier results.

Method

Sample

Participants were 207 high school students enrolled (Spring, 1983) in a small midwestern city (population approximately 8000) located in Michigan's upper peninsula. All participants had taken part in the original Franzoi and Davis study conducted the previous year (1982); thus, these 207 respondents represent the entire group for which complete 1982 and 1983 data were available. As in the original Franzoi and Davis investigation, all data were collected via self-report questionnaires, and all questionnaires were completed by the students during normal 55 minute class periods.

Questionnaire

Both the 1982 and 1983 questionnaires consisted of items tapping a wide variety of biographical, social, and psychological information. The variables of interest here are the private self- consciousness scale, the measure of peer self-disclosure, and the measure of loneliness. The private self-consciousness subscale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) has been widely used in recent years, and greater self-consciousness has been linked to a number of theoretically relevant constructs, such as more detailed self-knowledge (Franzoi, 1983; Turner, 1978) and greater correspondence between self-report and behavior (e.g. Scheier, et. al., 1978). Degree of peer self-disclosure was measured by four items ("What is important to me in life".

"What I like and dislike about myself." "My worst fears." "Things I have done which I feel guilty about.") selected from the Self-Disclosure Index (Miller, Berg, and Archer, 1983). Using a five-point scale running from "Discuss not at all" to "Discuss fully and completely", subjects indicated the extent of their current disclosure to peers for each of the four items. Research has indicated that subjects scoring high on the SDI have been found to report more actual disclosure to others than subjects scoring low on the index (Miller, et al., 1983). Finally, degree of loneliness was assessed by using the four-item short version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, et al., 1980), which consists of two positively-worded items ("I feel in tune with the people around me." and "I can find companionship when I want it.") and two negatively-worded items ("No one really knows me well." and "People are around me but not with me."). Russell, et al. (1980) recommend this shortened version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale in survey research.

Results

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Insert table 1 about here

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Unlike the Franzoi and Davis (in press) study, the present results are based on standard regression analyses (Cohen & Cohen, 1975) where each variable is treated as if it had been added to the regression equation in a separate step after all other variables had been included. Results are presented in Figure 1.

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Insert figure 1 about here

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In the 1983 data the relation between private self-consciousness and peer self-disclosure is in the expected direction and is statistically significant. The relation between peer self-disclosure and loneliness is also consistent with the 1982 data and is statistically significant. Thus, the data from 1983 replicates the 1982 findings.

To test the hypothesis that self-disclosing to others produces an increase in the level of private self-consciousness, the beta coefficient between peer self-disclosure in 1982 and private self-consciousness in 1983 was examined and found to be nonsignificant. This suggests that the act of self-disclosing does not produce a greater tendency to attend to one's private thoughts and feelings. Thus, there is no evidence indicating a feedback loop in the private self-consciousness to self-disclosure causal chain.

To test the hypotheses that increased loneliness leads to less peer self-disclosure or that loneliness leads to an increase in the level of private self-consciousness, the beta coefficients between loneliness in 1982 and self-disclosure and private self-consciousness in 1983 were examined. Again, as with the 1982 self-disclosure and 1983 self-consciousness relation, these beta coefficients were not statistically significant.

Finally, a few words should be mentioned about the stability of the variables over time. The personality variable, private self-consciousness, exhibited the greatest degree of stability from the 1982 to the 1983 testing ($r = .5$[illegible], $\beta = .59$, $p < .001$), followed by self-disclosure tendencies ($r = .40$, $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$), and then loneliness ($r = .34$, $\beta = .33$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

These results provide at least three interesting and useful findings. First, they indicate that the pattern of important relationships discovered in

the original Franzoi and Davis study and the variables themselves are stable over time. Both the 1982 and 1983 data reveal a significant positive relationship between private self-consciousness and self disclosure, and a significant negative relationship between self-disclosure and loneliness. Although the size of these two relationships fluctuate somewhat (one relationship is larger, and one is smaller, in 1983), in each case the sign of the association is the same and in each case the association is significant. In addition, it was found that the three variables measured over the two year study are relatively stable, with the personality characteristic being the most stable of the three.

The most important finding of the study is that neither of the alternative interpretations of the original 1982 investigation received support from the present data. That is, the data from this study provides neither evidence that greater self-disclosure leads to a greater awareness of private thoughts and feelings, nor any evidence that greater loneliness leads to less peer self-disclosure. The relationship paths that would support such interpretations--from 1982 disclosure and loneliness to 1983 self-consciousness and disclosure, respectively—were both small and nonsignificant. In the absence of such evidence, the original interpretations offered in the initial Franzoi and Davis study are strengthened: habitual self-attention during adolescence does not lead to social isolation, but rather, can facilitate an intimate social sharing with one's peers that reduces feelings of loneliness.

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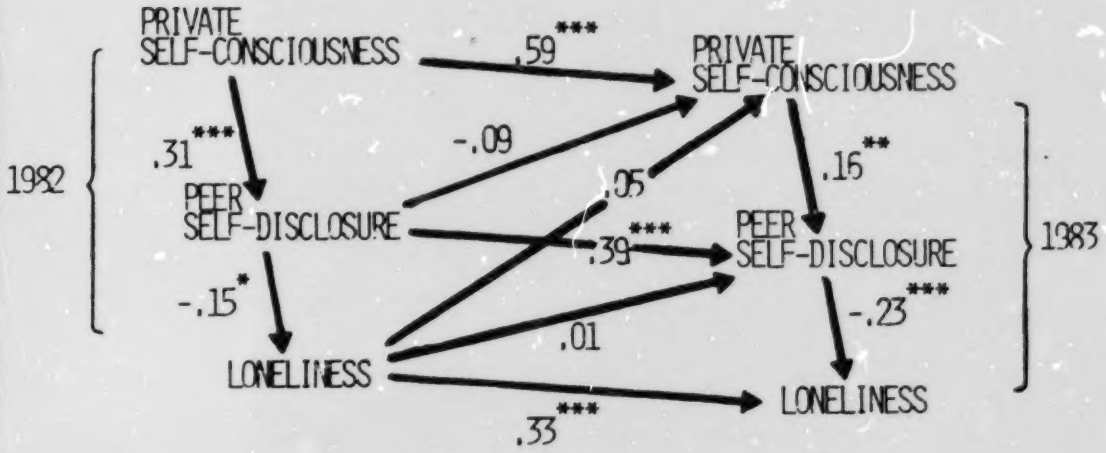
1982 & 1983 HIGH SCHOOL DATA - FIGURE 1



***P < .001 **P < .01 *P < .05

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and correlations of variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	$\bar{X}$	SD
1. Private self-consciousness (82)	1.00	.56	.31	.25	-.04	.00	34.6	5.3
2. Private self-consciousness (83)		1.00	.09	.20	.04	.09	35.6	5.2
3. Peer self-disclosure (82)			1.00	.40	-.15	-.12	12.3	3.6
4. Peer self-disclosure (83)				1.00	-.04	-.25	13.3	3.7
5. Loneliness (82)					1.00	.34	7.9	1.9
6. Loneliness (83)						1.00	7.6	2.1

Note. All correlations are based on an N of 207. Correlations of $|.13|$ are significant beyond the .05 level; correlations of $|.17|$ are significant beyond the .01 level.